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ABSTRACT

Principal succession is misunderstood and underutilized as a means of affecting dynamic renewal in school communities. Previously, the replacement of a principal was examined solely through the experiences of principals and teachers. This paper reports on a case study that added the previously neglected perspectives of students, support staff, and parents. The data compiled during the study emerged from personal interviews with the departing principal, the incoming principal, teachers and support staff, parents and children, plus examination of relevant school documents. The study revealed that principal succession affects all members of a school community and that all stakeholders contribute to the outcome of the succession. Stakeholders experienced various stages concerning principal succession, involving fear, detachment, expectation of change, enchantment, and disenchantment. Interestingly, children were not consulted regarding their hopes for a new principal, and the possibility that they might have been affected by a transition of principals was not considered. Instead, they were invited to participate in rituals of farewell that the teachers and parents controlled. Understanding the existence of significant variables can assist educational leaders in shaping the outcome of principal succession experiences. Principal succession should not be viewed as a single, principal-centered event. Effective succession is dependent on skillful facilitation of the powerful relationships among the many dimensions of school culture and organization. (Contains 25 references.) (DFR)

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PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Principal succession is misunderstood and underutilized as an opportunity to affect dynamic renewal in school communities. In a departure from a research tradition that examines the phenomenon of principal succession through the experiences of principals and teachers, this case study adds the previously neglected perspectives of students, support staff and parents. Within a theoretical framework of presuccession and postsuccession, the data compiled during the study emerged from personal interviews and examination of relevant school documents. The study revealed that principal succession affects all members of a school community and that all stakeholders contribute to the outcome of the succession. Understanding the existence of significant variables can assist educational leaders in shaping the outcome of principal succession experiences. Principal succession should not be viewed as a single, principal-centered event. Effective principal succession is dependent on skillful facilitation of the powerful relationships among the many dimensions of school culture and organization.

Introduction

School boards are in the inescapable position of regularly replacing school-based administrators. Historically, school districts have relied on changes in school leadership as a means to provide professional growth for teachers and administrators and to rejuvenate school communities. Weindling and Earley (1987) estimated that 7% to 10% of principals are replaced each year in the United States. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) anticipated that well over half of current principals in North American schools will have retired and been replaced by the year 2003. Gabarro (1987) asserted that retirements and career transitions could result in some school leaders changing principal assignments six to eight times during their careers. Finally, it has been estimated that between 1995 and 2005 the Calgary Board of Education, one of the largest Canadian urban school districts, will have replaced over 85% of its current principals due to reassignments and retirements (J. Frank, personal communication, December 2, 1997).

Unquestionably then, there will be many principal transitions over the next several years. And one might wonder if school organizations are being prepared adequately for the potential of these transitions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore responses to principal succession and to more fully understand ways that principal succession can be successfully facilitated. This study was based on work previously completed by Fauske and Ogawa (1987) and Ogawa (1991). It is worth noting that this study includes participation by students, parents and support staff, groups that were noticeably absent in previous research.

Previous Studies

It would appear that there are five significant perspectives through which the phenomenon of principal succession has been observed within the educational context. One area of study has traced the emergence of principal succession research from a tradition of leadership succession within a business context. A second important focus for research has provided insight into how succession studies have led to understandings regarding the impact of the principal on the performance of a school organization, and the influence of the principal on school climate. A third research focus has centered on how principal succession may affect student achievement. The phenomenon of principal succession has provided an opportunity for researchers to closely investigate the ways in which organizations influence principal socialization experiences. Through a fifth perspective of the phenomenon, researchers have attempted to identify predictable stages of succession.

Carlson's (1961) vanguard investigation of executive succession with a focus on school superintendents provided the initial bridge from succession research in business and industry to the unique world of school systems. His work established a framework of inquiry that has supported many of the succession studies in education that followed his own. He drew on a succession framework that included stages of presuccession, the actual succession event and its consequences, and preparation for subsequent succession. Most of the current research on principal succession can be linked to the findings and questions raised in Carlson's study.

Some researchers focused on variables associated with a stage framework of succession, attempting to determine how each phase of a succession process influences the outcome of the next phase (Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1984; Miskel & Owens, 1983; Ogawa, 1991). Other studies attempted to correlate the variables associated with a succession to those organizational outcomes that may include performance or response to change (Firestone, 1990; Johnson & Licata, 1995; Ogawa & Hart, 1985; Rowan & Denk, 1984). Some researchers have attempted to determine the influence of a variety of factors on the outcomes of the succession. Variables such as size of organization, frequency of succession, management style, perceptions of the new principal, and lag time between appointment and the actual succession event have all been subject to scrutiny (Macmillan, 1993; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1984; Miskel & Owens, 1983; Noonan & Godman, 1995). The majority of early succession studies in education described the effects of succession on the administrator and, conversely, how the administrator affected the organization. Recognizing the importance of the organization in the outcome of succession, Hart (1993, 1991) investigated frameworks of professional and organizational socialization of principals.

There are some theorists who have suggested that succession research should replace more traditional studies of the leadership role (Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Miskel & Owens, 1983). They maintain that a focus on leadership studies during the instability of succession allows an investigation of leadership during phases where "old resource allocation decisions are argued again. . . suppressed ideological divisions over goals and performance are raised for reevaluation, and. . . job responsibilities are redefined" (Miskel & Owens, 1983, p.25). However, in a later review of succession literature Miskel conceded that rather than substituting for more traditional studies of leadership, ". . . succession studies can supplement and provide alternative strategies for understanding the nature of leadership in schools" (Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985, p. 102). This change, subtle in wording yet conceptually significant, may be indicative of a turning point in an understanding of the role of leadership in school organizations.

Ogawa (1995) called the concept of principal succession "deceptively straightforward" (p. 360) and identified three forms of ambiguity which shroud the research concerning this phenomenon. First, there are the variables inherent in administrator selection that may affect the process of succession. These include the influence of gender, race and ethnicity, ways in which administrators are socialized to new roles and to the new organization, and the process of administrator selection. The second form of ambiguity to which Ogawa pointed is that the terms administrator and leader are used interchangeably throughout succession literature in spite of a vast conceptual space between the two, noting a need to look critically at these "twins separated at birth" (Ogawa, 1995, p. 361). The third form of ambiguity emphasized by Ogawa is in the purpose of the research that has been completed. He indicated that a subtle but significant difference exists between two traditions of succession research. Some studies (Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985) looked at the phenomenon of succession in an attempt to explain whether or not administrators influence the performance of school organizations, taking advantage of the opportunity to observe variations in administrative factors while organizational and environmental factors remain somewhat constant. Hart (1993) responded to the concerns Ogawa expressed by identifying four branches of succession research. The branches she identified included: the effects of succession which are different from general leadership effects; the impact of leadership on organizational performance; personal, social and organizational variables which interact during succession; and, stages of succession over time. Rather than attempting to segregate the variables as Ogawa seemed to in his discussion of the purpose of succession research in an educational context, Hart appeared to emphasize the interdependent nature of the research that has been completed in this area.

A powerful conclusion of Noonan and Goldman's (1985) study of the influence of principal succession on school climate was that "administrative succession does not necessarily change a school's climate" (Noonan & Goldman, 1995, p. 14). While the researchers conceded that many variables such as changing classroom enrolments, budgetary factors and staffing issues make the measurement of climate unstable, their conclusion speaks strongly to the influence of the organization on incoming administrators. They also hypothesized that an organization's initial stage of enchantment where individuals experience feelings of rejuvenation and enthusiasm regarding the change of principal may be due to factors such as the timing of the succession or the possibility the staff is waiting for the new principal to prove himself.

Studies attempting to examine the effect of principal succession on student achievement are inconclusive, which is consistent with the studies that examine principal effect on efficacious schools and student achievement, (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985).Results of studies attempting to determine this influence are mixed and in most cases have been conducted in organizations other than schools (Brown, 1982; Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985). In a review of previous succession studies, Fauske

and Ogawa (1987) found that a change in principal has little or no affect on an organization's performance. It would appear that conditions and variables surrounding the succession affect these conclusions. Brown (1982) argued that because of its disruptive effects, succession either has no causal impact or a negative impact on organization effectiveness (p. 1). The role of the leader in a school ". . . becomes effective when a principal succeeds in shaping a climate in which there is agreement on fundamental values and practices, and such agreement constitutes a shared view of the school's nature and objectives" (Schwartz & Harvey, 1991, p. 291).

Rowan and Denk (1984) found that school leadership changes can affect the levels of students' basic skills achievement, but the effects are ameliorated by socioeconomic variables within the school community. They argued that previous studies of effective schools, which found that principal leadership affects academic outcomes, had been conducted primarily in schools with high proportions of students from economically disadvantaged environments. Consistent with previous research, Rowan and Denk found that schools where the learning community was composed of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tended to increase in achievement when the principal changed. However, where the percentage of students from families receiving government financial assistance was below 20%, the effects of principal change were negative. Their findings posed a significant challenge to previous research. In a very similar study, also employing standardized test scores as indicators of student achievement, Ogawa and Hart (1985) acknowledged that ". . . such factors as the socioeconomic status of students and the extent to which students are non-English or limited-English speakers are inadvertently subsumed under school" (Ogawa & Hart, 1985, p. 70). In a later analysis of their data, Rowan and Denk (1984) found that the succession effects on student achievement they had identified were not sustained in later periods. This suggests ". . . that the effects of principal turnover were merely short-lived displacements in achievement and were not repeated in following school years" (Rowan & Denk, 1984, p. 532). Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) argued that the change in achievement level could be correlated with a change in teacher effectiveness at the time of succession. They determined that ". . . once individuals have been successful, they are taken for granted; they rest on previous accomplishments or they become complacent"(Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985, p. 92).

As a participant observer, Hart (1987) described her own succession experience as principal of a large high school. She concluded that environmental, personal and social dimensions interacted to give meaning to the succession experience, and that it was through this interaction that her leadership was defined. Hart determined that more important than research studying personal and organizational factors of positive succession experiences could be research examining the mechanisms that successors can exercise in order to make visible ". . . their most appropriate personal and professional traits. . . " (Hart, 1987, p. 9).

Johnson and Licata (1993) studied the relationship between the conditions existent throughout principal succession as perceived by the principal or the teacher and, subsequently, teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness. An important aspect of this study is that the researchers attempted to identify "situational favorableness" (Johnson & Licata, 1995, p. 400), which included the strength of the predecessor, the "Rebecca Myth" or the tendency to idealize the recollection of the predecessor, and confidence in the successor.

Johnson and Licata (1995) concluded that school districts tended to select new principals from within their own ranks, thus enabling continuation of the values, norms, and practices of the district. It was the opinion of the teachers interviewed that the most effective successors are those who demonstrate a ". . . robust leadership style. . . who successfully articulate and advance a school vision. . . who prove competent in the management of school administrative practices. . . " (Johnson & Licata, 1995, p. 414).

Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) described leadership succession as a "generic organizational phenomenon" (p. 2) in their study of the effectiveness of school administrators. Recognizing the interactive nature of many variables existent in a school organization, they created a theoretical framework of presuccession factors which was comprised of four categories: reasons for the succession, selection process of the new administrator, the reputation of the new administrator, and the career orientation of the successor (Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985). Gordon and Rosen (1981) found that when leaders are elected, they have more influence over subordinates than do those who are appointed by senior district leadership. They also determined that the circumstances surrounding the departure of the predecessor have a major influence on the effect of the organization's new leader.

The origin of the successor is a variable that has continued to be significant in succession studies, just as it was in Carlson's (1961) study. Generally, it is found that those leaders recruited from outside the system experience an increased vulnerability to the "Rebecca Myth," and a decrease in trust because of the

successor's willingness to challenge the norms existent within the organization (Carlson, 1961; Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Johnson & Licata, 1995).

Fauske and Ogawa (1987) conducted one of the most thorough case studies of a school faculty's presuccession responses, and identified three themes: detachment, fear, and expectation. The study was conducted to extend Gephart's (1978) grounded theory of leader succession. Gephart's theory was generated from observations of his own forced departure as a leader of a university student association, a context significantly different from that of a principal succession.

Gordon & Rosen (1981) and Miskel & Cosgrove (1985), queried the relationship between presuccession and postsuccession factors in their attempts to create a succession model. Miskel & Cosgrove (1985) attempted to determine the influence an administrator has on student learning by studying a framework of succession, specifying variables associated with the succession. Ogawa (1991) accessed the same school site that he and Fauske (1987) studied during its presuccession. The conclusion of Ogawa's (1991) study indicated three stages in the postsuccession framework. He used the term "Enchantment" to describe the initial stage when teachers were optimistic about the change in leadership in spite of uncertainty about the change. In stage two, or "Disenchantment," teachers questioned the principal's commitment to the school after decisions with which some staff members disagreed were made. Anger and insecurity were expressed and issues regarding differences in socioeconomic status, the principal's attitude, and his frequent absences from the school were raised. The third stage identified by Ogawa was called "Accommodation." In this stage, he found that teachers became isolated in their practice and they maintained that changes as a result of new administration had not significantly affected them investigated the response or sense-making of stakeholders other than teachers and school or system leaders. Response to a new leader begins in the presuccession stage during which variables such as source, expertise, experience and reputation of the new leader set the stage for the succession event (Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985).

Existing studies of administrator succession in school organizations are few, and remain inconclusive as to the effect leadership succession can have on a school organization. Positive, negative, or no effects lead one to the conclusion that the outcome of leadership succession experiences depend on the relationships among many variables in a particular organization.

Most succession studies focused on the principal, the search for outcomes and the variables which may influence those outcomes, but failed to generate convincing new succession hypotheses (Ogawa, 1995). Therefore, principal succession research in the traditional sense may be nearing an end to its usefulness in leadership studies (Hart, 1993). The reality is that ". . . little is known about administrator succession, its effects on organizations, and the factors that may color those effects" (Ogawa, 1995, p. 379).

The Need for Further Study

Principal succession is a complex phenomenon which "changes the line of communication, realigns relationships of power, affects decision making, and generally disturbs the equilibrium of normal activities" (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985, p. 88). A change of principal precipitates a complex social process that affects all individuals within a school community. Recent studies have provided qualitative descriptions of the affect of principal succession (Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Hart, 1993, 1991; Harvey, 1991; LeGore & Parker, 1997; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985; Miskel & Owens, 1983; Ogawa, 1991; Ogawa & Hart, 1985). These researchers concurred that principal succession significantly affects the life of a school. However their findings remain inconsistent on the question of whether the outcome of principal succession is positive or negative. All of these researchers agreed that the complexities surrounding a succession experience are immense and varied. In their findings the researchers indicated that the new principal's leadership style, background and gender interact with situational factors such as the reputation of the previous administrator, school size and dominant socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to shape the succession experience. However, the impact of succession on school effectiveness remains unclear.

Ogawa (1995) argued that one of the limitations we face in understanding the complexity of principal succession is a lack of research in the area. "Research simply should be conducted. . . . The impending, wholesale replacement of school administrators offers both a rationale and opportunity to study succession" (Ogawa, 1995, p. 385). Hart (1993) claimed that systems of support which may be helpful throughout a school's principal succession experience have not been studied, largely because there appear to be no school systems that have a defined system in place. She asserted that the best possible outcome of

a principal's succession experience would result from the implementation of systems of support which are grounded in a more thorough understanding of the complexities of principal succession.

A more informed perspective of the succession process, including an understanding of the interactive conditions of school organizations, would support principal succession as a way to rejuvenate and revitalize a school community. It is clearly evident that further research in the area of principal succession is required.

Methodology

For the purposes of this research project, data were gathered from three primary sources. The literature on principal succession provided examples of previous research, in addition to a variety of possible outcomes of this project. Interviews with study participants provided a rich narrative of the succession experience, told from many perspectives. A collection of relevant documents such as minutes from staff and parent council meetings and newsletters allowed a view of the messages the school chose to share with the community as well as the issues of relevance that arose during meetings.

The Participants

The five groups of people interviewed for this research project were the principals, students, support staff, parents and faculty of the case school.

The Departing Principal. The departing principal had been employed by the school district for over twenty years. She had spent the last six years at the case school, as assistant principal for two and subsequently as principal for four. Her previous career experiences had been as classroom teacher and as a district specialist. She was seeking new experiences and her decision to leave precipitated the succession experience at the case school.

The Incoming Principal. The incoming principal's career experiences had spanned a period of approximately twenty years with the same school district. Before her transfer to the case school, she experienced three years in her first principalship at a small inner-city school. Her career had been comprised of experiences as classroom teacher, teacher-librarian, district specialist and assistant principal.

Teachers and Support Staff. Of fifteen full-time teaching faculty members, four teachers and the assistant principal were interviewed for this project. Their experience ranged from a teacher in her second year of teaching, to one who was in her twentieth year of teaching. Three of five members of the support staff also volunteered to participate. Their experience in the school ranged from one to six years and their roles varied from teaching assistants to library assistant to the secretary.

Parents and Children. Five parents, who also agreed to allow their children to participate in the project, were interviewed. When the school district was originally approached regarding the involvement of students in this project their inclusion was discouraged. For this reason only children whose parents had volunteered for the study were included.

The parents who were interviewed had varying levels of involvement in the school. The children ranged in age from nine to eleven years, and in grade level from grade three to six. No siblings were interviewed.

The Setting

The school that was accessed for this study was one of over two hundred twenty schools within a large urban public school district in western Canada. A majority of the two hundred seventy-one students who attended the school lived in the surrounding area. Some students were brought from other parts of the city by parents who were drawn to the school by its reputation of academic excellence. In fact, at the time of the study there was a waiting list for students who lived outside of the community boundaries of the school. Most of the students were children of professional, well-educated parents and a majority of the families enjoyed the presence of both parents in the home. According to some parents and staff, many of the families had chosen to purchase homes in this particular neighborhood in spite of comparatively high real estate values in the area to ensure that their children would be able to attend this specific school.

Key Findings

Principal succession precipitates a series of predictable responses from all members of a school organization.

Stakeholders involved in this principal succession study experienced stages of succession similar to those described in previous research (Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Fauske, 1991; Hart, 1987, 1998; Johnson & Licata (1995); LeGore & Parker, 1997; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1984, 1985; Parkay & Hall, 1992). Fear, detachment, expectation, enchantment, disenchantment and accommodation are stages within a theoretical framework of presuccession and postsuccession that Fauske and Ogawa (1987) and Ogawa (1991) applied to organize the responses of teachers to the experience of principal succession. These stages of succession characterized the experiences of all stakeholders in this case study.

It was observed that each stakeholder group experienced the various stages in unique ways and the intensity of each stage appeared to be affected by an individual's sense of placement within the hierarchy of influence in the organization. Each stakeholder group presented a unique perspective or view of the school organization and their role within it. This influenced the way they experienced the succession.

Fear

The outgoing principal and the faculty in this case sought to protect the status quo of the school organization. They experienced fear that a new principal would challenge their accomplishments and redirect the school's focus from that which they had fostered. The children feared that the predictability of their environment would be altered and that their safety would be compromised. The parents represented in this case expressed two competing viewpoints about the direction in which they wanted to see the school go and feared the principal would support one viewpoint over the other. The support staff feared their employment would be changed significantly as a result of a change in principals and expressed concern that their roles would be changed under the new leadership.

Detachment

All stakeholders in this case experienced some sense of detachment in the succession experience. Consistent with Fauske and Ogawa (1987) the faculty expressed a sense of detachment from the process of selecting a new principal. While they appreciated the opportunity to be included in the identification of characteristics they sought in a new principal, they also felt that, in the final analysis, their opinions would not be considered imperative in the selection process. In fact, the teachers believed that it was the parents who possessed the power to force the school board to find a principal candidate who could match the reputation of the school.

Expectation of Change

Hoy and Aho (1973) wrote that faculties associate principal succession with an expectation of change in the school organization. The data in this case study are consistent with previous research and suggest that all members of the school organization associate principal succession with anticipated changes in the direction and organization of the school. All stakeholders in this case expressed an expectation that as a new principal arrived at the school, change would occur. They expected that the new principal would affect the culture and organizational structure of the school according to the beliefs embraced by the new principal and the experience and strengths she possessed.

Enchantment

All stakeholders experienced a stage of enchantment when they believed the new principal possessed the qualities they sought or demonstrated beliefs congruent with their own. The stage of enchantment depended on the belief resident within each stakeholder that the new principal's actions were supportive of the school community. For teachers and some parents in this case, enchantment was related to the principal's espoused belief that the school was successful and that she would be spending time finding ways to support them in the existing work of the school. For other parents enchantment was related to their perception that the new principal was willing to hear their opinions and to challenge existing beliefs and actions within the school. The support staff members experienced enchantment as they came to realize that the new principal was supportive of them and their current work. Children gained confidence during a stage of enchantment when the new principal became someone they could trust.

It is safe to say that the stage of enchantment was related to feelings of relief for all stakeholders. They were pleased to see that the new principal would support them in their current work, that they could trust her, that she would listen to their opinions and a call for change in the school. The stage of enchantment continued as long as a stakeholder group felt supported by the new principal.

Disenchantment

As the new principal began to position herself in decisions that needed to be made, such as those around staffing, volunteer programs and core pedagogical beliefs in the school community, it was inevitable that she would express disagreement with someone in the organization. When her decisions challenged the expectations of an individual or a group, reactions were characterized with disillusionment and disappointment. It is likely that the stage of disenchantment was perpetuated in this case when the new principal did not act or respond in ways that people anticipated. Real or imagined understandings the stakeholders had formed about the new principal as a result of her reputation and their initial meetings with her created false expectations. For example, the teachers relied on the reputation of the principal to support their belief that she would not challenge the status quo of the school. When she began to question the lack of parental input in decision making in the school, teachers began to feel disenchanted. They believed they had become repositioned in the hierarchy of power within the school organization.

All stakeholders in this school community experienced succession in similar stages. However, the intensity and outcome varied for each stakeholder group depending on the variables associated with each stage of succession and the amount of authority the group felt they possessed in the decision making processes of the school.

Stages of succession are influenced by many variables.

Analysis of the data presented for this case study revealed that the outcome of the succession was influenced by variables consistent with those identified in previous studies of principal succession (Firestone, 1990; Johnson & Licata, 1995; LeGore & Parker, 1997; Miskel & Cosgove, 1984, 1985; Ogawa & Hart, 1985; Rowan & Denk, 1984). Considerations such as the reason for the departure of the current principal, the selection process of the successor, and the reputation of the successor significantly influenced the timing and intensity of the shift from one stage of the succession to the next.

Reason for the Departure

The reason for the departure of the outgoing principal influenced the responses of individuals to the new principal and shaped the incoming principal's initial work in the school organization. Even though some members of the school organization wondered if the outgoing principal had been forced by the superintendent to go to her new placement, it was generally understood that she had independently made the decision that it was time to leave her current school. There was an understanding in the school community that all principals leave after a certain period of time and stakeholders were aware that the departing principal had been at the school for six years. Even though some were shocked with the sudden nature of the announcement, they were not really surprised that their principal would be leaving. The community was willing to support the incoming principal, at least in part, because they wanted to support the outgoing principal in her new role.

Miskel and Cosgrove (1984) found that when a predecessor advances to a career position that appears to recognize the skills and background he or she possesses, the successor may feel a reluctance to initiate immediate changes. In this case the perception was that the departing principal was being valued by the school system because she was being placed in a school they believed required a strong, effective principal. At the same time, the incoming principal at the case school felt honored to have been appointed to this school and was reluctant to facilitate change because of the reputations of both the school and her predecessor. The incoming principal was willing to overlook actions and cultural ways of being in the school that may have contradicted her own beliefs as long as she felt there was no harm to the children.

The organization was willing to accept the incoming principal because they were not surprised to see the outgoing principal leave. They believed the outgoing principal was being valued by the school district. This was not perceived to be a forced succession even though it was dictated by time.

The Selection Process

In this case, the adult stakeholders in the school community were given the opportunity to identify characteristics they would like the incoming principal to possess. The outgoing principal recommended and approved of her successor. Although some teachers, parents and support staff expressed cynical feelings about the process, believing that the new principal had already been selected by the district superintendent, it was generally acknowledged that the incoming principal possessed beliefs and capabilities congruent with those identified by the stakeholders. The opportunity to participate in the selection process engendered a sense of confidence in the new principal, and propagated the stage of enchantment on her arrival.

The Reputation of the Successor

Stakeholders made initial judgements about how successful the new principal would be, based on her reputation within the school system. In this case, the new principal's reputation was positive. The departing principal had recommended her, and individuals in the community had heard from a variety of sources that she was an excellent candidate for the position. Teachers and support staff believed the new principal would support the beliefs and processes that were already in place at the school. Parents hoped the new principal would negotiate some changes that they sought. Gordon and Rosen (1981) found that the perceived characteristics of the successor, even though they may vary from his or her actual characteristics, play a part in determining how smoothly the successor and the group will develop their new association.

The incoming principal's decision that she would be an observer in the school to determine how she could best contribute was short-lived. Soon after her arrival, she noted that some of her core beliefs about community involvement in the school community's decision making processes were challenged by the present decision making processes. It was this contradiction with existing systems of belief in the school that led to a stage of disenchantment for the faculty of the school. When the new principal began to assert beliefs that did not correspond with stakeholders' perceptions that she would act in the same or, at least, in similar ways as her predecessor, individuals became disillusioned and disappointed.

It is evident that variables connected to the process of succession have a significant influence on the outcome of the succession. The outcome of principal transition can be manipulated by closely analyzing the existent factors and anticipating how these factors will influence the school community.

Powerful hierarchical structures should be challenged in principal succession.

Through a research lens that was focussed on principal succession in one school an established hierarchy of position within the organization was observed. This raised a question about how stakeholders' perceptions of principal succession arose from their understandings regarding their place in the organization. It was unclear whether a stage framework for principal succession such as that presented by Fauske and Ogawa (1987) and Ogawa (1991) would only apply to school organizations that continue to honor traditional hierarchical structures. Previous principal succession research supports a hierarchical perspective of school communities by viewing and studying the phenomenon only through the perspective of the administrators or faculty.

It was concluded that the responses of the organization would be different throughout principal succession if more of the stakeholders had viewed themselves as empowered, informed members of the community. The data in this study suggest that each of the stakeholder groups expressed feelings of decreased empowerment and decreased efficacy throughout the principal succession experience. When the teachers' positional authority within the hierarchy was challenged they became disillusioned. As well, parents vied for a more powerful place within the hierarchy. Each group believed that someone else was in control, no matter where they were in the hierarchy of the school community. For example, the principals in this case felt some element of control from their school system. The outgoing principal was distanced from the process of finding a successor even though she took it on herself to make specific recommendations about possible candidates. The teachers felt that a new principal had the power to change the way they worked and to foster a new set of beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning. The support staff felt no sense of being part of the organization other than the fact that they worked in the school and could be told by the principal what their jobs would entail. The children felt they were under the direction of the principal, teachers and their parents.

Those who expressed the most vulnerability throughout this succession experience were the support staff. They believed that they were viewed as the least important members of the school

community and felt they had the least influence on the organization. The support staff members, including the administrative secretary who valued her close relationship with both the departing and incoming principals, believed their individual roles and positions in the school were in jeopardy with the impending principal succession. These individuals, with the exception of the administrative secretary, were the last to be informed officially regarding the transition that was to take place and they were the last employees to know who the new principal would be. Their meetings with the new principal were by chance, except for the rare occasion when they were invited to a staff meeting. They did not have the opportunity to meet with the new principal on an individual basis to discuss their perspective of the school, their hopes for their roles within the school or their vision for the school. The embedded ranking system of the support staff was a hierarchy of importance based on the number of hours one worked, the years one had been at the school, and the amount of knowledge one possessed about the school community. These individuals found themselves in the position of having to anxiously await the decisions of others to determine their destiny in the school. Would the support staff have experienced the same fears and concerns if they had felt included as integral, important members of the school? A partial answer to this question resides in the experience of the school secretary throughout the succession. She was an invaluable source of information about the community and the workings of the school. Once she had established that she would be valued and trusted by the new principal, her fears were alleviated and she was able to move on in her work.

Parents and teachers unwittingly competed for opportunities to assert their opinions and wishes regarding the direction of the school. The incoming principal's willingness to hear the voice of the parents displaced the teachers from the position they had previously held as a primary voice in the hierarchy of the school. In this case the hierarchy was challenged by the incoming principal. She possessed beliefs about community involvement that differed from those of her predecessor.

The stakeholders in this school community were well intentioned in their espoused belief that they were child-centered in their decisions. However, noticeably absent from the hierarchical structure in the case school were the children. How different would this succession story have been had children's voices been more prevalent?

In this case, a powerful cultural hierarchy tended to exclude learners, marginalize staff and parents and inhibit the progress of the organization. Townsend (1996) observed that there appear to be very few principals who appreciate the potential of the school community to assist in the achievement of important goals in school development. He expressed concern that many principals did not have a plan in place to build "essential bridges between staff and community that would promote effective partnerships of mutual benefit" (p. 8). Principal succession offers an opportunity for existing hierarchical structures to be examined and challenged by the incoming principal, and for building bridges that invite the school community into the school.

Children are not invited to contribute in the decisions that significantly affect them.

The children interviewed seemed to observe principal succession as an adult-oriented process in which they had little involvement. They did not even appear to have input into the ways they wanted to say farewell to the outgoing principal and welcome to the new principal. Instead, they were invited to participate in rituals of farewell that the teachers and parents controlled.

However, the children appeared to be the most accepting and resilient group throughout this particular principal succession. It seemed to be an unspoken expectation that the children would accept whatever decisions were made on their behalf. They anticipated change, watched for change and welcomed change. School seemed to be something that happened to children rather than with them.

The stakeholders in this case seemed to be well intended in their belief that they were working on behalf of the children in their care. However it was evident that the children at this school were excluded from the hierarchy of authority in the decision-making processes of the school. This is a significant observation because the unspoken belief that children cannot make reasonable judgements for themselves and about their environment reverberates through the findings of this study. This is ironic because it challenges the centrality of children in schools.

Children were not consulted regarding their hopes for a new principal and the possibility that the children might have been affected by a transition of principals was not considered.

Implications for Further Research

This case study is intended to contribute to an increasing body of literature concerned with the phenomenon of principal succession. It is important to remain cognizant of the need to continue in this important research tradition. We need to continue to illuminate the potential of principal succession to rejuvenate school communities and to inform educational leaders, assisting them in the decisions they make when guiding individuals and communities through this complex process. Ogawa (1995) stated that further research is required to more fully understand the complexities of principal succession. Several questions worthy of further investigation arise from this research

1. A primary focus of this research project was to determine if parents, children and support staff experience principal succession in stages similar to those experienced by faculty. Because stakeholders other than teachers and principals have been ignored in previous published research, it is important that the results of this study be confirmed or dismissed by comparable studies. Understanding how communities respond to and shape succession experiences can assist educational leaders in determining effective approaches to facilitating the process of principal succession.
2. It would be an interesting focus of study to continue to look at the issue of the effects of hierarchical structures in schools. While studies focussed on principal succession can magnify the hierarchies that exist in school organizations, it can be determined that hierarchies play an important role in the positive or negative outcome of principal succession in a school community. A further understanding of the ways in which incoming principals effectively or ineffectively challenge existing hierarchies could illuminate our understanding of the potential of succession. More importantly, a focus on challenging hierarchical structures could provide further insight into the broader context of educational leadership and reform.
3. Another interesting focus would be to study a school organization where the outgoing principal had been unsuccessful and subsequently removed or fired, or where the incoming principal experienced a lack of success. Studying succession from these perspectives could provide further insight into a variety of stakeholder expectations and perceptions of the qualities and characteristics of a successful principal.
4. Ogawa (1995) pointed out that traditional leadership succession research fails to address a distinction between administration and leadership. Leadership succession in an organizational perspective has traditionally focussed on the principal as the key leadership figure within a school. This study was no different in that it focussed on the succession of the principal. In order to challenge existing understandings regarding the potential influence of leadership succession, studies that look closely at how school organizations respond to the succession of unofficial leaders in the school need to be designed.
5. Noonan and Goldman (1985) hypothesized that the postsuccession stage of enchantment characterized by feelings of rejuvenation and enthusiasm could be a result of a faculty returning from summer holidays with a sense of optimism and a desire to prove themselves. The principal succession in this case study took place in a traditional calendar year where the new principal entered the school organization at the beginning of a new school year when teachers and other community members were energized, optimistic and refreshed. Studies that investigate principal succession at various times of the year could challenge existing theoretical frameworks of principal succession.

Improving the Process

Recognizing that principal succession is a complex process that affects all members of a school organization we believe that more attention is needed in the facilitation of this process.

An attempt to create a list of recommended procedures for principal succession is futile given what we know about the complexity of school communities. Each school is comprised of variables that contribute to the unique nature of its own community. However we know the goal of a principal entering an established school community is to become a respected member and affirmed leader of that existing social organization. If the new principal is unsuccessful in achieving this goal, the implications for the school organization are negative. Challenging existing beliefs and then reconsidering existing procedures

connected with principal succession may be the most effective way to facilitate more positive succession experiences with school communities.

Changing the Perspective

Perhaps the most important recommendation that must be drawn from this research is that principal succession cannot be viewed as a principal-centered event. School districts that focus on leadership development in their succession planning must begin to find ways to invite school communities into the work of planning for their schools. This includes planning for succession and infers the need to teach school-based leadership how to hear and empower the voices of all stakeholders. In recognizing the voices of stakeholders, schools hone and value the expertise resident within their communities. This suggests that school communities are very able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. If this is true, then school communities are equally able to identify the strengths they require in a school leader who can move the organization forward.

Timing

The consideration of timing in principal succession is twofold: the period of time over which the succession occurs, and the time of year in which the succession is to take place. School systems must emphasize issues of timing when planning for principal succession. Support for successor principals should be facilitated through the provision of time for visits to the new school thus ensuring opportunities for the successor principal to work with the departing principal. Furthermore, successor principals should be given the opportunity to work closely with members of the school community in order to confirm or dispel rumors and fears and to begin establishing relational patterns before the succession occurs. It is imperative that principal succession be viewed as a series of events rather than as one event.

The outcome of the succession can be greatly influenced by the time of year the new principal begins the process of becoming immersed in the new school environment. The beginning of the school year may not be the best time for a principal to be introduced to an established school culture. For example, at the end of a school year, the incoming principal could be involved in decisions that would affect the following year. Introduction in the middle of the year would give the new principal time to observe the patterns of the organization and to plan accordingly. Decisions about the timing of succession need to be correlated with the needs of the organization.

Increased Understanding

Educational leaders must be apprised of the potential for principal succession to be a dynamic, positive experience for a school community. They must also be aware of the potential for this series of events to negate progress. An increased understanding of the stages of succession and the variables that can influence stakeholder groups can assist principals new to a school in interpreting the culture of the school community they are entering. In addition, school communities must be made aware of the dynamic social forces that shape the outcome of a succession. Increased awareness for all stakeholders creates the potential to dismantle hierarchical structures and inhibit the competition these structures enhance.

Conclusion

Carlson (1961) taught educators that the outcome of leadership succession in an educational setting is influenced by the origin of the successor. Since then principal succession has been studied from a variety of perspectives. This study echoes the findings of earlier research, for example, principal succession significantly affects school organizations and many variables contribute to the outcome of a succession. The significance of this study lies in the addition of the previously neglected perspectives of students, parents and support staff. In spite of an increasing body of research to support the understanding that principal succession is a significant in the history of a school, we believe that principal succession is approached mainly as a principal-centered, singular event in the history of a school community.

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